

Urban Communication: The Blind Men and the Elephant

Robert Beuka, **SuburbiaNation: Reading Suburban Landscape in Twentieth-Century American Fiction and Film**, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, 284 pp. \$21.95 (paperback).

Paul Mason Fotsch, **Watching the Traffic Go By: Transportation and Isolation in Urban America**, University of Texas Press, 2007, 254 pp., \$22.95 (paperback).

Timothy A. Gibson & Mark Douglas Lowes, **Urban Communication: Production, Text, Context**, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006, 224 pp., \$29.95 (paperback).

Steve Macek, **Urban Nightmares: The Media, the Right, and the Moral Panic over the City**, University of Minnesota Press, 2006, 372 pp., \$22.95 (paperback).

Daniel Makagon, **Where the Ball Drops: Days and Nights in Times Square**, University of Minnesota Press, 2004, 296 pp., \$20.00 (paperback).

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The parable of "The Blind Men and the Elephant" is well known; although its rich and long history is surprising having originated in China during the Han dynasty (202 BC – 220 AD). Nevertheless, we would like to borrow the parable by way of introducing this review of recent publications that deal with the nature of the urban landscape. The parable is about the differences in which the elephant is experienced by the three men, one touching the ear, the other its knee, and the other its tail, but each perceiving their individual perspective to be complete.

Over the past several decades, much has been written about the city and the urban experience and that interest is increasing with the estimate that in the next decade over 70% of the world's population will live in an urban environment (Whitehouse, 2005). In a report prepared by the UN Commission on Population, former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan stated that half of the world's population would live in cities in two years. Hania Zlotnick, Director of the United Nations Population Division, said "with hindsight, the 20th Century was the century of urbanization."

The city as an economic, social, and iconic symbol of national prosperity has been, and is, under scrutiny by economists, geographers, and sociologists, among many — each interpreting and analyzing the parts through the lens of their particular discipline and recommending solutions and change based upon a relatively narrow perspective. Until recently, the lens of communication scholars has been in the

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background, if at all present. Although the essence of the urban landscape is community and is thus by etymological association a matter of communication, the binding and interdisciplinary power of the communication perspective on practice and theory has been negligible.

In 1977, Christopher Alexander (Professor of Architecture at the University of California), wrote in *Pattern Language*, "Cars give people wonderful freedom and increase their opportunities. But they also destroy the environment, to an extent so drastic that they kill all social life."

"The effect of this particular feature of cars on the social fabric is clear. People are drawn away from each other; densities and corresponding frequencies of interaction decrease substantially. Contacts become fragmented and specialized, since they are localized by the nature of the interaction into well-defined indoor places – the home, the workplace, and maybe the homes of a few isolated friends."

Substitute the word telegraph, telephone, radio, television, computer, Internet and Wi-Fi for car and Christopher Alexander's perceptions gain momentum and import, although the notion of communication technology is absent from this extraordinary tome – although by that time, radio and television had already changed the social fabric of the American home.

We might argue the nature of the consequences, but it is difficult to refute that the introduction of each communication device into the marketplace reformulates the nature and value of daily life. We hear the disquieting cries of worrisome change – loss of community, privatization, increasing surveillance, the demise of public space, the possibility of identity theft, the loss of the small shop, the rise of the mall, increasing crime, and fear of life on the street. We are aware of shifting values, particularly interpersonal ones but appear not to understand or connect the changes with communication development, design, and social policy. Can we assert that our social and psychological selves are linked to the introduction of communication technology? This kind of deterministic reasoning offends those of us who believe in primacy of free will.

In 1964, Melvin N. Webber (1964) described the transformation of community from propinquitous to non-propinquitous, from a place to a non-place orientation, as spatial proximity or nearness no longer became a necessary prerequisite for the relationships of social community. "With few exceptions, the adult American is increasingly able to maintain selected contacts with others on an interest basis, over increasingly great distances and is thus a member of interest-communities that are not territorially defined" (1964). More recently, Webber said, "metropolis is a massive communications switchboard . . . It exists because interdependent persons and groups have to be accessible to each other and because the cost of overcoming space has not yet reached zero" (Webber, 1996).

Not only are we getting closer to that zero point, but we function in a multi-media environment characterized by "displacement — one *occasion* replacing or *dis-placing* the other (temporal), "replacement" — the substitution of a *physical place* for a non-physical site (spatial), and "a-location" — the severing or *de-connection of event* from location (Gumpert & Drucker, 2004).

We communicate amid an electronic complex of networked computers, mobile and wireless telephones, facsimile machine, a high definition wide screen receiver, a videotape and DVD playback/receiver unit, and multiple Internet connected stereo audio systems. We sit on a quiet suburban street. We are in community, but with distant others. We journey by car and plane, to shop at the superstore and the mall, but more often and constantly we travel electronically to near and distant (the

miles are irrelevant) multiple communities. We share responsibilities with an increasing number of distant colleagues, but have no obligation to our next-door neighbor – perhaps, in some cases, not even knowing their names.

Vital social life once offered by an urban environment, one replete with busy streets, markets, parks, promenades, and squares, was long a defining characteristic of town and city culture. The social town and city has been reformulated by technologies that permit communication through connection rather than through more traditional face-to-face contact. The change in the urban landscape is accompanied with the rise of digital cities over the entire globe. They come with a variety of labels: digital, cyber, smart, wired, and tele. So the urban landscaping in becoming increasingly urban, suburbia (those outlying parts of a city or town generally residential) is becoming urban and defining urban: rural is fading into oblivion.

The purpose of this essay is to discuss, perhaps even evaluate, some current volumes that examine the city and/or its parts from the perspective of communication. Current communication excursions into the urban landscape are indebted to a group of visionary researchers and writers who paved the way for volumes we will discuss now and in the future.

The quality of urban life and communication has a rich and varied scholarly pedigree. The literature is varied. From social commentary and urban studies, to sociology, geography, cultural anthropology, environmental psychology, urban planning and design, many have studied the elephant.

"Urban writer and activist" Jane Jacobs established the initial critique of the modern city in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961). Her passionate attack on city planning and rebuilding has been called "the most influential American text about the inner workings and failings of cities" (Project for Public Spaces, 2008). Along with Jacobs, the work of Lewis Mumford has been influential in shaping the vision of urban planners, historians, sociologists, and architectural critics. Well known for these clashes with such urban planners as the legendary Robert Moses, he strongly objected to massive urban renewal projects that put roadways through cities. He was an advocate for urban quality of life, his most noteworthy work was *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Prospects* (Harcourt, Brace, 1961) which traces the development of the city from its early Mesopotamian and Egyptian roots through the Middle Ages to its modern day manifestations and planning principles.

William H. Whyte, along with Jacobs, spearheaded a movement calling for a community-centered approach to urban planning. William Whyte focused on social spaces of cities, examining the uses of design and management of public spaces. His Street Life Project emphasized the significance of small open spaces as explored in *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* (1980) to *City: Rediscovering the Center* (1988).

Christopher Alexander's (Alexander, Ishikawa et al., 1977) *A Pattern Language* is a seminal work that provides architectural patterns of Space. Each "pattern" represents a rule governing a piece of a complex system such as a city. The pattern can be applied systematically to solve problems of urban architecture and building spaces. In *A Pattern Language*, Alexander and his colleagues extracted 253 solutions or design "patterns" that recurred in architecture. Thus, for example, the need for gathering places is manifested in such key elements as streets cafés, beer halls, food stands, individually-owned

shops, promenades, shopping streets, night life, etc. "Pattern groups" are the tools empowering anyone and any group of people to create functional places.

In *The Image of the City* (1960), Kevin Lynch explored user perception and space. In this well-known volume, he reported on the elements he identified in the forming of mental maps (e.g., districts, nodes, paths, landmarks, etc.). Providing valuable information for city planners, Lynch's work has been praised as a classic that adds to design principles by attempting to develop urban design guidelines. It is not difficult to step from understanding user perception to social uses of city spaces.

Urban designer Jan Gehl of the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen detailed the array of social functions served by public spaces in *Life Between Buildings: Using Public Space*. This is a wonderful introduction to those beginning to consider outdoor public space as a medium of communication and focuses on "interaction of the physical environment and activities in outdoor public space." (p. 55). Gehl's stated purpose is to provide a background for "instigation of meeting possibilities and opportunities to see and hear other people." (p. 15). Gehl's creative analysis focuses on outdoor public space. His book identifies the communicative functions of space with sections dedicated to "seeing, hearing and talking, social distance," and "conversational landscapes" (p. 55). He recognizes the relevance of media options when he notes: "The telephone, television, video, home computers, and so forth have introduced new ways of interacting. Direct meetings in public spaces can now be replaced by indirect telecommunication. Active presence, participation, and experience can not be substituted with passive picture watching, seeing what others have experienced elsewhere" (p. 51).

Insights from the field of environmental psychology enhance an understanding of the communicative nature of cities through investigation into the processes of environmental perception and spatial cognition. The environment-behavior relationship is associated with privacy, crowding, territoriality, the restorative power of nature, the psychological impact of density and spatial arrangements, noise, light and more. There is an abundant literature in this area with great relevance to the social dimensions of space. For readers seeking an entry point into this body of literature, *Environmental Psychology: Principles and Practice* (4th ed., 2007) by Robert Gifford offers a comprehensive introduction to fundamental issues and thousands of references, and a useful appendix with websites and organizations.

Stephen Graham, professor of human geography at the University of Durham integrates media advances and the built environment quite directly. Graham's work highlights the ways the urban landscape are shaped by and reflect the digital world. This work links telematics and transportation, the relationship between virtual and place-based communities, urban economics, surveillance, mobile technologies and the need to link urban and media planning. In 1996, he and Simon Marvin co-authored *Telecommunications and the City: Electronic Spaces, Urban Places*. This volume is a bold attempt to move telecommunications to center stage in urban studies and policy (p. 75). The authors synthesize a body of literature, exploring the relationship between cities and telecommunication networks by contrasting the history of urban development and parallel growth of the communication infrastructure. They seek a "new, more sophisticated more integrated approach to understanding city telecommunications relations" (p. 112). In *The Cybercities Reader* (2003), Graham assembles a group of leading scholars exploring the modern city and the media that reshape cultural, social and economic urbanity.

The central significance of the social dimensions of information technology, globalization and the new economy is brought together in yet another strand of research from outside the field of communication. These issues were extended by Joel Garreau in *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier* (1991). Garreau coined the terms "edge city" to describe the major suburban economic belts surrounding American cities as the latest transformation of how we live and work. He identifies them as places filled with office towers, huge retail complexes, and always located close to major highways, arguing they are becoming the standard form of urban growth worldwide. The pattern of development in edge cities is identified as multi-nodal rather than mono-centric facilitated by developments in communication technologies. Media technologies are reshaping cities, reconfiguring suburbia and making cities aspatial and global.

Manuel Castells' influential trilogy explores *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*, (particularly *The Rise of the Network Society*) (1996) the relationship between communication technologies and the function and future of cities. Castells analyzes the development of the Internet in the context of broader media developments of the 20th century concluding that social and cultural stratification results.

As opposed to those authors, some analyze the fantasy nature of the virtual world rather than its impact on the physical domain. Studies in "digital communities" or "virtual communities" abound (e.g., Rheingold, 1993). Scholars have examined diverse facets of human presence in virtual space (e.g., the sociology of cyberspace, the social construction of avatars, etc.) in the mode of Sherry Turkel's *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* (1995). Part of the emerging field of social informatics focuses on the nature of digital cities. A digital city can be a social information infrastructure for urban life (including shopping, business, transportation, education, etc.) and an infrastructure of information and real-time sensory information related to the city. The relationship between the digital and "real" (physical) city is incorporated in this work.

Alessandro Aurigi, an architect and Director of the Department of Architecture at University of Newcastle upon Tyne considers this relationship in *Making the Digital City: The Early Shaping of Urban Internet Space* (2005). This volume examines the digital public space projects in European cities and how spaces adjust to the social realities of spaces with civic information networks (e.g., Bologna, Italy and Bristol, England).

Others have placed the mediated community in the foreground of their work with the connection to physical environment in the background. This is reflected in the work of sociologist Barry Wellman, director of the Net Lab in Toronto. Wellman examines social networks in communities, emphasizing the role of the Internet, mobile telephones and other communication technologies. He argues against the study of online social life segregated from other aspects of everyday life in *The Internet in Everyday Life* (co-edited with Caroline Haythornthwaite) (2002).

Some have attempted to bridge architecture, urban planning and media studies. Perhaps best known is William J. Mitchell, former Dean of the School of Architecture and Planning at MIT. In *City of*

Bits: Space, Place, and the Infobahn (MIT Press, 1995) he outlines the initial impact of the information superhighway on urban design and social relationships. He followed this with *e-topia: Urban Life, Jim—But Not as We Know It*, in which he explored the relationship between software and city planning and suggested ways of integrating telecommunications into mixed-use communities. In *Me ++: the Cyborg Self and the Networked City*, Mitchell turns to the role of self within an electronically adapted environment filled with cellphones and Wi-Fi Internet access. Perhaps most significantly, he argues that the digital revolution will alter human settlements in ways as fundamental as the agricultural and industrial revolutions before. He calls for an understanding of ways in which the physical and virtual are symbiotic and fluid multi-functional places. With physical cities changing as they become increasingly electronically augmented, he suggests ways of conceptualizing the future of urban life. It is of particular interest to note that he and others in the MIT Media Lab are housed within the School of Architecture and not in a School of Communication.

Communication Scholars View the Pachyderm

More recently, scholars emerging from their circumscribed silos have begun to address the urban/suburban landscape through more embracing lenses of the communication discipline. There is a distinct thread of scholarship developing through which urban/suburban/rural issues are seen through the prism of communication. Using established communication studies approaches/methodologies; these works explore the historical, philosophical perspectives along with case studies of the interpersonal and media landscape of spaces, places and communication texts. The following authors investigate what communication research and insights provide in the study and design of urban centers and suburban life. Several address how the understanding of urban and suburban life are reflected in and shaped by media coverage or representations in factual or fictional contexts. Others turn to close analysis of media texts to learn about urban and suburban life.

The most direct attempt to articulate the scope and potential of urban communication scholarship can be found in two recent anthologies. We hope that we are forgiven for briefly mentioning our own. The *Urban Communication Reader* edited by Gene Burd, Susan Drucker and Gary Gumpert (Hampton Press, 2007) and *Urban Communication: Production, Text, Context*, edited by Timothy A. Gibson and Mark Lowes (Rowman and Littlefield, 2007) attempt to articulate an urban communication perspective.

The Urban Communication Reader begins to articulate the scope of urban communication research by featuring case studies, ethnographic, empirical, philosophical, historical and “think pieces” written by scholars representing diverse areas of the communication discipline. The contributions represent research in rhetoric, media studies, political communication, health communication, organizational communication, legal communication, visual communication, conflict resolution, and cultural studies. The driving force of the reader was a tacit agreement for an increasing need “for balance between the traditional geographic community and the newer virtual multimedia-constructed communities, and the unintended and dysfunctional consequences of the new communication technologies and digital environments” (Burd et al., p. 2). Themes include rhetoric of public art, contested spaces, the branding and marketing of cities, interpersonal interaction in public space and loitering, architecture, planning and symbolic communication, public policy and Wi-Fi and media rich environments. Many of

these entries suggest new research avenues; call attention to neglected connections and explore diverse issues to be explored "in the urban communication mosaic."

Neglected communication connections are also the message of Gibson and Lowes in *Urban Communication: Production, Text, Context*. Whereas Burd, Drucker and Gumpert provide a platform for communication scholars, Gibson and Lowes show how urban communication grows from interdisciplinary specialties. The editors bring together scholars working on the "borderland between communication and urban studies." They lament the "artificial division of academic labor — with communication scholars studying 'discourse' and urban studies scholars studying 'history and political economy'" (p. 4). This volume attempts to bridge the research of two very specific areas of scholarship, "urban studies" and "communication" (p. 5). These scholars explore the crucial intersections between critical theory, cultural studies, and contemporary urban political economy. The editors outline a clearly focused "conceptual map" of the border between urban and communication studies which is narrower and more focused than the vision articulated in the *Urban Communication Reader*.

Gibson and Lowes draw on the critical cultural studies approach proposed by Richard Johnson. Applying Marxian political economy and structuralism, they organize the volume around the study of the social flow of cultural forms and the heuristic power of production, text and context. The media texts range from media images of "quality of life" to brick and mortar urban spaces studied to reveal cultural understanding of the "urban good life" and the forces shaping the strategies of urban development, revitalization and promotion. The introduction offers a "Map of the Field" of urban communication structured around production, text, and context associated with urban promotion (identified as a global scale) and urban struggle (identified as local scale). The book is organized into three parts: A) the city in production; B) the city as text; C) the city in context.

Part I, the city in production, features chapters on the motives and strategies used to promote and revitalize cities within the framework of interurban competition and local political struggle. Diverse case studies are provided ranging from pre-Katrina, New Orleans to the branding of Washington, D.C. Kevin Fox Gotham and Jeannine Haubert explore the development of prisons and casinos to illustrate their concept of neo-liberal revitalization. The authors articulate a persuasive argument by connecting these two seemingly dissimilar spaces, both are "heavily surveilled, regulated and policed" (p. 25). They argue that despite the different purposes, the construction of prisons and large entertainment projects such as convention centers, stadiums and casinos reflect a pattern of increased government investment of public funds in privately-controlled facilities in the name of increased employment and tax base. This role of local state government in investment, deregulation and privatization in the name of urban revitalization is called *neo-liberal revitalization*.

Additional chapters explore the introduction and regulation of the Internet in the city/state of Singapore (Gerald Sussman), the branding of cities through the creation of urban promotional images (Timothy Gibson) and the creation of fantasy cities built to re-ignite local or as an "urban growth machine." John Hannigan tackles this last variation on a theme of "city in production" in an intriguing look at the development of sites of "spectacular consumption" (i.e., casinos, megaplex cinemas, restaurants, retail outlets, etc.). The urban development models identified are Las Vegas and Disney theme parks. The

relationship between urban growth and consumerism of "fantasy cities" is contrasted with urban growth rooted in cultural institutions or vibrant "no-bohemian" art-filled neighborhoods.

Part II, the city as text, explore the rhetorical dimensions of city revitalization through the examination of public and privately-produced promotional material and reports and the physical architectural texts cities offer. Chapters include the cultural politics and values embedded in architectural design of Dublin, Ireland (Andrew Kincaid) and the promotional material for Ottawa, Canada (Caroline Andrew). Carey Higgins and Gerald Sussman's contribution explores the importance of local television news as a significant source of urban texts. While this piece focuses on the impact of commercial news story selection on urban politics and cultural life, it suggests an important corollary study examining what communication research provides to the study and practice of journalism.

The City in Context, Part III, offers studies in the social and ethical consequences of urban revitalization and promotion. Lowes and Tranter look at motorsport events as a form of spectacular urban promotion and consider the unintended consequences of the attendant health and environmental risks. The volume concludes with chapters on activism in Third World cities using Cairo as a case study (Bayat) and the cultural politics of lower Manhattan and the post 9/11 World Trade Center site.

A number of rich urban case studies have been produced by communication scholars vibrantly illustrating the potential for communication scholarship applied to urban and suburban conditions. Diverse theoretical and methodological perspectives are culled from the communication discipline that communication scholars have much to offer in the study, teaching and application of communication principles in urban and suburban contexts.

In Urban Nightmares: The Media, the Right, and the Moral Panic Over the City, Steve Macek deals with "discourse on the urban crisis." Macek's argument that the coverage of the urban landscape found in television and print news portrayed the city as "terrifying and crime-filled, confirmed suburbia's racist fantasies about ghetto culture, and embraced conservative mystifications (and exaggerations) of the cities' problems." He documents the ubiquitous themes of the "city's moral decline and rampant criminality" and the resulting rise of public alarm about the dangers of the city.

Urban Nightmares is filled with detailed exemplars of specific media texts to illustrate the nature of the discourse demonstrating that "dominant representations of the American city circulating through media and public discourse in the 1980s and 1990s framed the poverty-stricken centers of our urban areas." (p. 291). What takes this analysis beyond a mere content analysis is the refined articulation and substantiation of the political implications of this discourse. Macek posits that conservative politicians demonized the city, demonized poor and working class city inhabitants and shifted blame for the conditions of urban centers to stoke the fires of suburban middle-class fears. He convincingly weaves the connection between the frightening discourse of the city and the consolidation of the "rightward drift of U.S. politics since the early 1980s" (p. xvi).

One particularly timely connection is made between the rise of New York City's Mayor Rudy Giuliani and the rhetoric of the ungovernable city.

. . . [The] out-of-control city propelled tough-talking former prosecutor Rudy Giuliani into the New York City mayor's office in 1994. Once in power, and informed by the "broken window" theory of crime . . . Giuliani instituted a policy of "zero tolerance" toward lifestyle crimes such as panhandling, public drunkenness, and graffiti. In practice, "zero tolerance" meant aggressive policy harassment of homeless people, an intensified drug war directed at poor black youth, and "the dissolution of existing constraints on police power in the name of 'reversing the decline in public order" . . . Disneyfied Times Square — for redevelopment as upscale entertainment centers and festive marketplaces catering to middle-class suburbanites and tourists (and goes without saying, excluding less-affluent city residents). . . . (p. 111).

The argument furthers an understanding of how the dominant discourse across media texts served to mask the genuine causes of conditions and discontent. The role of corporate media's promotion of the alarmist message is associated with the concentration of media ownership.

The relationship between middle class values, suburbs and underlying issues of race are skillfully explored. Chapters explore the historical changes in suburbs, the ghettoization of the African American population and growth of affluent white suburbs in a home-centered culture emphasizing privacy and fostering at negative attitudes toward the city. The author seeks to identify the origins of the discourse in Victorian attitudes toward slums and in the long tradition of American anti-urbanism. Macek reviews theorizing about urban problems in the Reagan, Bush and Clinton years and then examines the images of U.S. cities during that time as zones of "apocalyptic social decay, wanton violence, and depravity" feeding suburban white middle class fears. The spotlight is shifted to the role of mainstream journalism in perpetuating and legitimating the conservative view of urban problems. He documents how television news focused on city troubles and deviant behavior to the exclusion of other city stories.

One of the great strengths of *Urban Nightmares* is the light shed on suburban dreams. Macek examines suburban fears of urban life as articulated by conservative politicians and depicted in mainstream films like *Batman*. Panic and fear concerning the urban crisis as represented and perpetuated in advertising is the subject of a concluding chapter. The potency of this volume is enhanced through compelling interpretations of influential works including Joel Garreau's *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier* (1991) and Witold Rybczynski's *City Life* (1995).

Strangely missing is any extended examination of what might be the ultimate urban nightmare: terrorism. Historical examples of connections between cities and acts of terrorism abound (e.g., London, Paris, Jerusalem, Tokyo, Athens, Oklahoma City). Acts of terrorism shape the perceptions and attitudes toward cities. While this line of argument may be peripheral to the main line of argument made in this volume, events of the last decade suggest some value in distinguishing panic and fear associated with terrorism and moral panic at the heart of this volume. Ultimately, from insights into the media, literature and politics of urban (and suburban) life, this book challenges the reader to think differently about the realities and representations of U.S. cities.

In a similarly engaging urban case study, *Where The Ball Drops: Days and Nights in Times Square* by Daniel Makagon (University of Minnesota, 2004), explores issues of urban revitalization, commodity culture, and social isolation in his detailed ethnographic study of Times Square. Times Square is viewed as symbolic communication and as a site of communication. Iconic of the global city of New York, it is one of the very few sites for mass public gatherings in the United States, a tradition of the European or South American town square.

Written as a personal narrative, the insights of the communication scholar are seamlessly woven into this well-written study. Makagon notes this is a work in the cultural studies tradition and explores different social and cultural fantasies about the meaning and realities of urban life advanced through various competing rhetorical visions.

Makagon introduces themes of conflict, public participation and private life, before moving to chronicle Times Square's past marked by competing visions of place, race, class and political economy. He then provides a detailed analysis of contemporary revitalization programs. The ramifications of gentrification and revitalization not only reshape the city but, the author argues, reflect the efforts of city planners and politicians to reform the class makeup of the urban center to reflect the "corporate fantasies of endless flow of consumers." He goes on to explore Times Square's status as "crossroads of the world." The recent Disneyfication of Times Square is considered as is the continued draw of Times Square despite its loss of authenticity. The way in which Disneyfication functions as an insurance policy capable of reducing urban fears is suggested by this discussion. The description of the Disneyfication process implies a significant tension between vitality and Disneyfication. The volume concludes with thoughts on how Times Square reflects larger inconsistent hopes and dreams about urban life even in the wake of terrorist attacks on New York City.

Makagon offers a close text analysis of a physical place offering both a micro and macro analysis. On one level this is an analysis of a people-place relationship but on another level, it represents the larger issues of diversity, control, and consumerism. One of the most compelling subtexts of this work is the inherent "cry for free expression" as the voices welcomed or permitted in Times Square are controlled or regimented in the progressive corporate takeover of the 42nd Street district.

Watching the Traffic Go By: Transportation and Isolation in Urban America (University of Texas Press, 2007) is an examination of transportation through the lens of communication and popular culture. Paul Mason Fotsch's examination involves the application of critical theory to explore the relationship of the link between communication and transportation is the result of the application of critical theory to the media landscape surrounding transportation. Fotsch focuses on the narratives shaping and revealing perceptions of developments in transportation.

Watching the Traffic Go By is in the tradition of Innis and McLuhan and Carey, emphasizing the direct link between developments in media and transportation. He quotes James Carey as saying "Changes have been enabled in part by innovations in transportation and communication that evolved with each other's aid. The telegraph increased the efficiency of the railroad by allowing rapid notification of trains or other problems down the track'. . . . The railroad in turn provides the right of way for

construction of telegraph lines (Fotsch, p. 2).” He explores our perceptions of innovations in transportation by looking at the stories we have built around these innovations.

Like Makagon, Fotsch’s analysis emphasizes how the built environment is simultaneously symbolic and material. He argues that the symbolic and material construction of space is a produce of and a response to particular histories — in this case, the histories of U.S. industrial cities. Like Macek and Makagon, Fotsch examines themes of isolation and the unique implications of transportation and suburbia for people of color and women.

The volume is divided into three main parts: Part I concerns the period of the automobile’s initial rise to prominence. The argument is made that the popularity of both the trolley and the automobile must be understood within the context of rapid industrialization, urbanization and immigration. He examines the media texts of magazines from the turn of the century arguing that these modes of transportation offered transport and control. Part II follows the entrenchment of the urban highway at mid-century. The author moves into close text analysis in his examination of Futurama, an exhibit at the 1939 World’s Fair sponsored by GM and designed by Norman Bel Geddes. Part III concludes with two studies of transportation featuring the “U.S. abandonment of public transportation and by implication of central cities” and the rise of the global economy and revitalization of the center city in the 1990.

Fotsch examines narratives revealing themes such as the automobile and upward mobility, female presence and privacy, the lure of the healthful environment of the suburbs, the problem of isolation, and the freeway as urban shield. Sprinkled throughout this work are insights into the thoughts of Lewis Mumford who frequently attacked the automobile’s dominance of the city yet supported the segregation of pedestrians on interior walkways leaving roads to cars, as an approach to urban planning. The author explores the relevance of cultural theory in the works of Theodor Adorno, and Max Horkheimer, which explored the passive acceptance of capitalistic technocratic rationality; the same rationality that underlay the parkway plan. From narratives in films such as *Double Indemnity* and *Sunset Boulevard* to the O.J. Simpson white Bronco chase on Los Angeles freeways, diverse narratives are explored. The book concludes with *three* historical times in the evolution of transportation and the city.

One of the contributions of a volume like *Watching the Traffic Go By* is that it underscores the relationship of urban infrastructure and communication technology, a connection with a long tradition. Cities have always required an infrastructure to connect its inhabitants. This analysis of transportation underscores that from roads to fiberoptics, the physical infrastructure of the city is intimately intertwined with the social structures of the city.

In each of the previous volumes, the unavoidable relationship between urban and suburban was either the articulated or inherent concern. The relationship of urban and suburban may be viewed as points on a continuum (transect) or as two albeit complementary entities representing a yin/yang relationship. The conceptual path of the transect, a planning principle introduced in the 1790 work of Von Humboldt, is based upon urban density. It proposes a linear route – natural, rural, suburban, general urban, urban center, and urban core and identifies a set of habitats that “vary by their level and intensity of urban character” (Bohl & Plater-Zyberk, 2006). In *SuburbiaNation: Reading Suburban Landscape in*

Twentieth-Century American Fiction and Film (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) Robert Beuka places suburbia in the foreground. This volume seeks to “understand the cultural significance of the suburbs. . . .” (p. 2).

The texts analyzed in *SuburbiaNation* are the literary and cinematic texts created during the rise and maturation of the suburb in the United States. Beuka analyzes how suburbs have been defined through its representation in popular media. His method is to pair a fictional portrayal of suburban life with a Hollywood film in each chapter as a means of exploring a given theme. The author argues the texts examined function as more than a backdrop but as “dynamic, often defining elements of their narratives.” The approach taken is distinguished from the “geographers approach” and is identified as more in line with humanistic geography or a cultural studies approach. Once again the symbolic and physical dimensions of the suburban landscape is explored with the author arguing suburban development created not only a new physical landscape, but a new psychic and emotional landscape as well. Relates film and fiction to place where Americans hold up the mirror to reflect on American middle class “American dream.” The suburb is positioned as a “heterotopia” (i.e., a place that serves to mirror the culture at large) (p. 7).

Beuka starts with two American landscapes – the Long Island Gold Coast in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s novel, *The Great Gatsby* (1925), and the small town in Frank Capra’s film, *It’s a Wonderful Life* (1946). Subsequent chapters include the following contrasting pairs: John Updike’s, *Rabbit Redux* (1971) and Mike Nichols’ film, *The Graduate*; John Cheever’s suburban sequence, *The Housebreaker of Shady Hill*, and Frank and Eleanor Perry’s film of one of Cheever’s most anthologized short stories, *The Swimmer*; Ann Beattie’s novel, *Falling in Place* (1980), and Brian Forbes’ film, *The Stepford Wives* (1975); Gloria Naylor’s satirical novel, *Linden Hills* (1985) and Reginald Hudlin’s film *House Party*, (1990); and Robert Zemeckis’s, *Back to the Future* (1985) and Todd Haynes’, *Far from Heaven* (2002) and Sam Mendes’s *American Beauty* (1999). Themes explored include suburb as opportunity or problem, gender identity and masculinity, surveillance, the utopian model of suburbia and American culture, race, and the embrace of domesticity.

Beuka places media texts in the foreground of his analysis in what can easily be seen as a media analysis although he, unlike the authors of all the previously-mentioned volumes, is not a communication scholar, but rather, a professor of English.

These volumes are remarkable in their scope, depth, and connections. While each represents a distinct approach, methodology or central text of analysis, recurring themes clearly emerge. Virtually all identify the tension or contradiction between community and isolation, connection and disconnection, inclusion and exclusion, public and private, safety and fear. So for example, Beuka deals with the collapse of the distinction between public and private spaces (p. 2); Macek explores the growth of “affluent white suburbs in private, home centered culture (p. xvii); while Fotsch develops the theme of the automobile as private environment that shields passengers, particularly commuters, from the realities of the urban landscape. Themes of exclusion and race are considered by Macek when he states “Historical changes in suburbs, the ghettoization of the African American population and . . . attitudes toward the city that range from indifference to open antipathy . . . resulted in landscapes of fear” (Macek, p. xvii). Fotsch echoes this theme when he notes, “Excluded from the suburbs, people of color remained in central cities, which continued to decline and became associated with crime and hopelessness” (Fotsch, p. 4). Beuka explores

ways in which African Americans became associated with the inner city despite the "Massive expansion of the African American community into the American suburbs," while Makagon explores efforts to push out minorities from Times Square through urban gentrification and revitalization projects.

Technological developments in media and transportation are consistently mentioned as reflected in the following statement found in *Watching the Traffic Go By*: "Mumford believed technology would allow the creation of a 'new regionalism,' permitting greater distribution of a city's benefits while eliminating the problems associated with large, crowded populations. The radio, the moving picture, the airplane, the telephone, eclectic power the automobile — all these modern utilities have only increased the potential advantages of the region as a whole over the metropolis." (Fotsch, p. 43).

Another shared theme is the concern for safety and fear of danger. While this fear is at the heart of Macek's work, it appears as a significant issue in many other works as well. Fotsch notes, "As indicted by the association of graffiti with a sense of 'danger' and a 'forbidding environment,' the appearance of graffiti was linked to a fear of crime" (Fotsch, p. 132). Certainly the metamorphosis of Times Square reflects a direct attempt to address perceived danger and crime. Surveillance in the name of safety or as an aspect of community is also explored repeatedly. Beuka suggests the increasing power of surveillance in postwar America and the impact such surveillance may have on community dynamics. He argues . . . "Concerns about the increasing visibility of private lives were to become part of the critique of suburbia in the cold war era, as the "picture window," a standard feature of the postwar suburban house, symbolically eliminated the distinction between the public and private sectors" (Beuka, p. 79). While Fotsch makes an argument against surveillance noting "Surveillance through video cameras might also do more harm than good. Hille Koskela, professor of geography at University of Helsinki contends that these cameras make public spaces less pleasant by requiring a type of self-monitoring that Foucault linked to the panopticon. Women in particular can be made uncomfortable by becoming objects of someone's gaze." (Fotsch, p. 149).

Placelessness, isolation, ghettoization and disconnection are repeated across these volumes. The "proliferating sense of placelessness and perceived homogenization of American Life" is emphasized by Beuka (Beuka, p. 2) while Makagon explores the relationship of fantasies about Times Square as compared with a sense of place and placelessness. The isolation of those in cities and suburbs is dealt with by all the authors. So for instance, Beuka suggests that men do not connect with each other because they lack connection to their place (Beuka, p. 123) echoing Makagon's observations on Times Square providing an arena for both anonymity, and isolation. Media representations are explored not only for what they reflect but what they create.

Conclusion

Like Gaston Bachelard (1964) noted in *The Poetics of Space*, "outside and inside form a dialectics of division." The linking of city and suburb, privacy and publicness, community and isolation, are additional communication dynamics of the dialectics of the city all explored in these communication texts. Collectively, they are a beginning in the search for the elephant. We borrowed the parable of the Blind Men and the Elephant to make a point, that in exploring the intricacies of the urban landscape each

discipline comes to the beast with vested interests. We can learn from each other, but it is essential that we connect the analytical perspectives. So we end our initial review with a accompanying plea for the primacy of communication as lens to begin an examination of urban space. In "Who Needs Cities? Urban Life and the Promise of Community," a talk that Paul Goldberger, former architectural critic for the *New York Times* and current critic for the *New Yorker*, gave at Chautauqua, the lens of communication is made eloquently clear.

"The urban impulse is an impulse toward community – an impulse toward being together, and toward accepting the idea that however different we may be, something unites us. But what do we do in an age when every force pushes us away from cities, pushes us apart rather than together? As we move more and more into an age in which we do not automatically build cities, we have to think hard about how the experience of being together will come to pass. In this society, we desperately lack a sense of community, a sense of common ground – a sense of the public realm. In an age in which we travel from private houses in little enclosed metal boxes on wheels into private office cubicles and then back again; an age in which we are almost never in a large public place save for an occasional visit to a sports stadium; an age in which the private experience of television and the VCR has replaced for many even the limited public experience of going to the movies, there is previous little sense of shared experience in our lives or a sense that there is such a thing as a common physical place that is designed for us all to come together and that, in and of itself, symbolizes our sense of community." (Goldberger, 1997, p. 4).

All is not hopeless and the challenge is to choreograph communication technology with urban design while preserving the norms of social interaction.

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